

Testimony of Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, President, Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice

July 7, 2011, House Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing: "Time to Pause the Reset? Defending U.S. Interests in the Face of Russian Aggression"

Distinguished Members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to come today to present my views on the state of human rights and the rule of law in Russia. As you know, my late father Tom Lantos was a former Chairman of this Committee and I am honored to have the opportunity to appear before his colleagues whom he both admired and deeply respected. My father was, in some ways, an old fashioned man, and he believed in the traditional notion that our partisan, if not our policy differences should stop at the water's edge. For this reason he was one of the most profoundly bi-partisan members of the Congress when it came to matters of national security and foreign policy and it is in that same spirit that I hope to present my remarks today.

In December of last year I travelled to Moscow to witness the culmination of the second "show trial" of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia's most prominent political prisoner. I went in order to speak out against the mockery of justice that it represented and in doing so, I was quite literally following in my father's footsteps. In May of 2005, Congressman Lantos stood on the steps of the courthouse in Moscow to denounce the outrageous manipulation and abuse of the Russian judicial system represented by the targeted prosecution of Mr. Khodorkovsky. Sadly, things have only degenerated in the intervening 5 years. Whatever small shreds of legal plausibility the first Khodorkovsky trial may have had, there can be no doubt that the second trial had only one true purpose and that was to keep a charismatic and compelling political adversary of Mr. Putin carefully locked away behind bars for as long as necessary. And what is it that makes Mr. Khodorkovsky such a threat to Mr. Putin? Above all it is his vision of a Russia open, transparent and genuinely democratic. Khodorkovsky stated it with humility and conviction in his closing words to the court at the end of his trial. He said "I am not an ideal person but I am a person of ideas" and over the nearly 8 years of his incarceration, Mr. Khodorkovsky has shown that he is prepared to make great sacrifices for those ideas: Ideas of a Russia with an independent judiciary where an individual's rights don't depend on the whim of the "Tsar"; Ideas of a Russia where democracy and freedom of the press are a reality and not a façade; Ideas of a Russia where the government is not the source of corruption and lawlessness but rather the nation's defender against such scourges. Mikhail Khodorkovsky is far from alone in believing in the importance of these ideas for the future of his country. While I was in Russia, I had the opportunity to meet with a variety of human rights activists and they uniformly expressed the conviction that things were moving in a very bad direction in their country. From the unexplained violent deaths of over 150 journalists, to the ongoing violation of Article 31 of the Russian constitution which protects the right of the people to peacefully assemble, they are deeply concerned about the future of democracy and pluralism and they want our help in standing up for these rights.

It was a bitter cold December day when I went to the Moscow courthouse and I was taken aback to see many dozens of protestors standing across the street quietly yet eloquently expressing their support for Mr. Khodorkovsky, Platon Lebedev, Sergei Magnitsky and other victims of an increasingly corrupt and undemocratic system in Russia. Their message to me was simple: Don't sacrifice the values on which we want to see the new Russia built. It is a message I believe we need to heed.

Thank you very much and I look forward to answering your questions.

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs

"TRUTH IN TESTIMONY" DISCLOSURE FORM

Clause 2(g) of rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives and the Rules of the Committee require the disclosure of the following information. A copy of this form should be attached to your written testimony and will be made publicly available in electronic format, per House Rules.

<b>1. Name:</b>  Katrina Lantos Swett	<b>2. Organization or organizations you are representing:</b>  Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice
<b>3. Date of Committee hearing:</b>  7/7/2011	
<b>4. Have <u>you</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<b>5. Have any of the <u>organizations you are representing</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>6. If you answered yes to either item 4 or 5, please list the source and amount of each grant or contract, and indicate whether the recipient of such grant was you or the organization(s) you are representing. You may list additional grants or contracts on additional sheets.</b>          	
<b>7. Signature:</b>  Katrina Lantos Swett	

Please attach a copy of this form to your written testimony.